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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 TEL AVIV 002950

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO  
E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

Please note: no Tel Aviv Media Reaction report  
Thursday, May 12, 2005, Israel's Independence Day  
holiday.

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Israel's 57th Independence Day

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media reported on events related to Remembrance Day for the Fallen of Israel's Wars, and Israel's 57th Independence Day, which will be celebrated tonight through Thursday night. The IDF has imposed a full curfew in the territories from this morning through Saturday night. The media cited GOI statistics, according to which the population of Israel has reached some 6,900,000, of whom 5,260,000 (76 percent) are Jews. Numbering 1,350,000, the Arab population constitutes 20 percent of the population. Another 290,000 (4 percent) are immigrants not registered as Jewish. 20,368 soldiers were killed in Israel's wars since the establishment of the state -- 169 over the past year. Jerusalem Post reported that the Palestinians are planning to mark Israel's Independence Day -- commemorating what they call the Nakba, or catastrophe -- by sounding a siren as an expression of mourning.

In an interview with Jerusalem Post, Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu delivered a "stinging assault" on PM Sharon's disengagement plan, asserting that it helps fuel a Palestinian perception that Israel can ultimately be destroyed altogether under unrelenting terrorist assault. However, Netanyahu also told the newspaper that he accepts disengagement as a done deal that reflects popular will. Leading media reported that the plan to relocate settlers from the Katif Bloc (Gush Katif) to the Nitzanim dunes located between Ashdod and Ashkelon received a boost on Tuesday when the National Council for Planning and Construction ordered the drawing up of a detailed master plan for the area.

Israel Radio reported that the PA has not collected weapons held by militants in Tulkarm and Jericho, despite assurances by PA leaders that this has been carried out and instructions handed down by PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas. The radio also cited criticism by Abbas of Sharon's postponement of the disengagement move, and of FM Silvan Shalom's remarks that a Hamas victory in the Palestinian elections would forestall the implementation of disengagement. Israel Radio also quoted Palestinian FM Nasser al-Kidwa as saying that the peace process will be discontinued if Israel does not abide by the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings.

Ha'aretz and other media reported that the U.S. and UN are looking into the possibility that an international force would replace Israel in the Sheba Farms area in exchange for Hizbullah's disarming and becoming a political party. The media reported that Terje Roed-Larsen, the outgoing UN envoy to the Middle East peace process, met a few days ago with Lebanese government officials in New York and told them that recognition of the Sheba Farms area as Lebanese would require a new border agreement between Lebanon and Syria, ratified in both parliaments, and then registering the new border lines with the UN. Israel Radio quoted senior GOI officials as saying that reports that Israel has agreed to such a deal are unfounded. The station quoted a

senior Lebanese official as confirming that Roed-Larsen told him that Israel will return the Sheba Farms area to Syria next month.

Ha'aretz (Aluf Benn) points out differences between the U.S. and Israel regarding Iran's nuclear "point of no return."

Ha'aretz recalls that U/S John Bolton, President Bush's candidate for the post of U.S. representative at the UN, has had poor relations with senior State Department colleagues, notably on the issue of Israel's use of U.S.-supplied arms. The newspaper evokes a report in which Bolton wrote that the assassination of Salah Shehadeh, in which 14 other Palestinians were killed, did not constitute a violation of the rules of use of American weapons. Bolton's paper contradicted the conclusions of another State Department document.

Ha'aretz reported that 12 reservists belonging to Battalion 925 of the IDF's Armored Corps have announced that they will refuse to serve, because they are involved in the struggle to prevent the evacuation of the Katif Bloc.

Ha'aretz cited a High Court of Justice petition filed on Tuesday, stating that the state has still not given Palestinians who own agricultural lands in Jerusalem permits to enter and work on their land, despite a ruling by A-G Menachem Mazuz that the 1950 Absentee Property Law does not apply to them.

Yediot reported that the Kuwaiti security services have recently arrested Dr. Salam Abu Shaaban, a Kuwaiti citizen of Palestinian origin, because he wrote a pro-Israeli article in a Kuwaiti newspaper. He and his wife were dismissed from their jobs, and his property was nationalized. Yediot reported that Shaaban told the Foreign Ministry, which he contacted through its web site, that fundamentalists were behind those moves, but that he will not give up his faith in peace.

Yediot reported that the PA and the Arab League plan to establish a sister-city alliance between Nablus and the German city of Nuremberg. The newspaper quoted official Israeli sources in Berlin as saying that the choice of Nuremberg is shocking because of that city's past.

All media reported on the dedication Tuesday of Germany's new national holocaust memorial in Berlin. Yediot reported that the EU has recently included the denial of Israel's right to exist in its definition of anti-Semitism.

Leading media reported that Jewish Agency Chairman Sallai Meridor told Sharon on Tuesday that he will step down at the end of June. Ha'aretz quoted a senior source in the Jewish Agency as saying that Meridor's departure was meant to allow Sharon to block the appointment to the chairmanship of Natan Sharansky.

Ha'aretz reported that a committee headed by Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz is formulating a new immigration policy for Israel that is expected to be as severe as any in Europe.

Ha'aretz retraces the involvement of U.S. foreign policy and intelligence in Israel's Independence and Six-Day wars.

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Israel's 57th Independence Day:  
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Summary:  
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Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "If every further evacuation is perceived as a trauma and not as a building block for peace, an historic opportunity, nearly the last opportunity to be a truly free nation, will have once again slipped out of our hands."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "When put in perspective all [of Israel's] problems are dwarfed by what has been achieved here since 1948.... Strategically, Israel is ahead of most countries in tackling the post-Cold War era's biggest menace -- terror."

Ultra-Orthodox Yated Ne'eman editorialized: "The celebrations of the State of Israel's independence ... symbolize the decline of the Israeli nations under the leadership of Zionist ideology."

Block Quotes:

I. "It's In Our Hands, and In Our Power"  
Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (May 11): "Fifty-six years ago, the War of Independence ended with the armistice agreements, thus achieving the goal we celebrate today on the 57th Independence Day: the establishment of an independent state for the Jewish nation in the Land of Israel.... This Independence Day there is nothing more optimistic and important to strive for than the repartition of the Land of Israel, by agreement and not through war, into the state of Israel and the state of Palestine, and to do so with sense and goodwill, on the assumption that if our neighbors benefit, perhaps so will we.... The disengagement from Gaza must be the first stage on the way to a logical partition of the country, an opportunity to create two independent entities, which through cooperation could bring prosperity while pettiness will lead to their destruction. Since Israel is more powerful and prosperous than its nascent neighbor, it can allow itself some calculated concessions.... If the entire intent in the departure from Gaza is to temporarily calm things down, neutralize international pressure and buy time, while looking for new subterfuges with which to grab more land with the help of the flexible route of the separation fence; if every outpost in the West Bank turns into 'the rock of our existence'; if every further evacuation is perceived as a trauma and not as a building block for peace, an historic opportunity, nearly the last opportunity to be a truly free nation, will have once again slipped out of our hands."

II. "Plenty to Celebrate"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (May 11): "Fifty-seven years after David Ben-Gurion declared its establishment, the State of Israel's daily affairs seem, on the face of it, as tiresomely familiar as those of most others. The Jewish state is deeply embroiled in diplomatic intrigue, in regional conflict and in far-flung arms deals, and its politicians are shoulder deep in struggles with judges, generals, and fellow politicians. Despite its genuine desire to realize Isaiah's visions of social justice, Israel also has its unfair share of poor, jobless and otherwise disenfranchised people.... Still, when put in perspective all these problems are dwarfed by what has been achieved here since 1948.... In fact, Israel's accomplishments are today impressive not only when viewed through such historic prisms, but also when compared with current global trends. Strategically, Israel is ahead of most countries in tackling the post-Cold War era's biggest menace -- terror.... Economically, in a developed world in which even veteran economies like Germany's and France's are struggling to achieve viable growth rates, Israel has managed to restore its economic growth even after being momentarily debilitated by a vicious terror war.... As we celebrate our independence tonight, we should take stock of all this and remember that with all the flaws, setbacks and hardships that involve our existence here -- it's worth the effort."

III. "No Holiday, No Independence"

Ultra-Orthodox Yated Ne'eman editorialized (May 11): "Aren't all the deeds of the Zionist leadership, when it comes to uprooting Judaism ... a sufficient reason for knocking off balance the festive character of this day?.... One may assume that those who support the celebrations this year would have had second thoughts if the issue of transferring all the territories, including East Jerusalem, to the Palestinian enemies, had been part of those festivities.... The celebrations of the State of Israel's independence ... symbolize the decline of the Israeli nation under the leadership of Zionist ideology -- which had dreamed of turning the House of Israel [i.e. the Jewish people] into a nation like all others."

KURTZER